



FEBRUARY 29, 2008

HEALTH ADVISORY

Minnesota Department of Health Reports Influenza-Related Pediatric Death

The Minnesota Department of Health distributed the following health advisory concerning an influenza-related pediatric death. The North Dakota Department of Health is forwarding this information to providers and reminding them to encourage their patients to receive influenza vaccinations. North Dakota providers are required to report all influenza cases and all suspected influenza-related pediatric deaths.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has been notified of a recent influenza death in a 12-year-old, unvaccinated child in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The child had a chronic underlying medical condition associated with increased risk of influenza complications and the child was found to have a concurrent staphylococcal necrotizing pneumonia on examination of the lungs after death.

The local public health agency in the child's county of residence has been notified. We anticipate media inquiries and will be distributing media talking points.

Pediatric influenza deaths are fortunately uncommon among children. In Minnesota, typically zero to few such deaths are reported annually. No other pediatric influenza-related deaths have been reported this season in Minnesota. During the 2006-2007 influenza season, six pediatric influenza-related deaths were reported in Minnesota. Nationally, 22 influenza deaths have been reported as of February 16, 2008 for the 2007-2008 influenza season. Since pediatric influenza-related deaths became nationally reportable in 2004, a total of 148 have been reported in the United States during the previous three influenza seasons; 68 for the 2006-2007 season, 41 for the 2005-2006 season, and 39 for the 2004-2005 season.

The national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted this week to recommend, beginning in the 2008-2009 influenza season, influenza vaccination for all children 6 months to 18 years of age. This is an expansion of the current recommendation of influenza vaccination for all children 6-59 months of age and children with certain underlying medical conditions placing them at higher risk for influenza complications. The goal of this expanded recommendation is to improve vaccine coverage for all children, including those at high risk. A news release is posted on the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/2008/r080227.htm>

This child's death does not necessarily indicate that children are at higher risk for influenza complications or death this season. School outbreaks continue to increase, with 42 outbreaks reported during the week of February 17- 23. By comparison, 95 school outbreaks were reported during one week at the peak of the 2006-2007 influenza season.

Influenza vaccine is the best protection against influenza, even when some of the circulating virus strains are not exactly matched to the vaccine. Although influenza viruses change over time, the viruses are still related enough to the vaccine strains for the vaccine to provide a good degree of protection. Also, vaccinated persons who still develop influenza will likely have much less severe disease.

This situation is likely to create an increased demand for influenza vaccine. With influenza activity still peaking in Minnesota, this is an opportunity to increase vaccination levels, particularly in children. MDH encourages local public health agencies to work with healthcare providers in their areas to determine vaccine availability and discuss possible public clinics. Healthcare providers may still order vaccine from their usual manufacturers or distributors. MDH will continue to post information about influenza clinics open to the public on the MDH website. Clinics may be added by logging onto the MDH influenza website, www.mdhflu.com, Find a Flu Shot Clinic.

Other measures to reduce the spread of influenza include thorough and frequent hand washing, staying home when ill, and covering one's cough with a tissue or coughing into one's sleeve. Healthcare providers are encouraged to promote the "Cover Your Cough" campaign by providing tissues or masks for patients and visitors who are ill.

Additional information on influenza, including influenza vaccine and antiviral agents, is available on the MDH website, www.mdhflu.com

Please contact the North Dakota Department of Health Division of Disease Control at 701.328.2378 or 800.472.2180 with any questions regarding this issue.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- *Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.*
- *Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.*
- *Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.*
- *Health Information provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.*

This message is being sent to local public health units, clinics, hospitals, physicians, tribal health, North Dakota Nurses Association, North Dakota Long Term Care Association, North Dakota Healthcare Association, North Dakota Medical Association, North Dakota EMS Association and hospital public information officers.

You have received this message based upon information contained within our emergency notification database.

If you have a different or additional e-mail or fax address that you would like to be used, please contact the

North Dakota Department of Health, Health Alert Network program at 701.328.1340.

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